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ABSTRACT

Little attention has been given to how school counselor education and professional training establishes competencies for which the duties constituting the practice of school counseling are uniquely derived. Furthermore, there is a dearth of information in the literature regarding how school counselor training, the national standards for school counselors and the national model for school counseling programs guides the practice of school counseling to meet the needs of the various constituencies in school settings. This paper focuses on the specific duties and services, commonly referred to in health related professions as the "scope of practice," that school counselors generally perform based on their professional training, national standards, and needs of the school community, within a comprehensive developmental school counseling program. (Contains 48 references.) (Author)

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Running Head: Scope of Practice for the 21st Century

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School Counseling: A Scope of Practice for the 21st Century

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Little attention has been given to how school counselor education and professional training establishes competencies for which the duties constituting the practice of school counseling are uniquely derived. Furthermore, there is a dearth of information in the literature regarding how school counselor training, the national standards for school counselors (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) and the national model for school counseling programs (ASCA, 2003) guide the practice of school counseling to meet the needs of the various constituencies in school settings. This paper focuses on the specific duties and services, commonly referred to in health related professions as the "scope of practice," that school counselors generally perform based on their professional training, national standards, and needs of the school community, within a comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

Confusion of School Counselor Roles

To meet the needs of children and adolescents in today's complex and troubled school environments, school counselors must be clear and definitive about the duties and services for which they are trained and competent to provide. Historically, there has been confusion about what roles, and more specifically what duties, school counselors are asked to perform in a school (Anderson & Reiter, 1995; Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994; Drury, 1992; Fitch et al., 2001; Gysbers et al., 2000; Gade & Houdek, 1993; Partin, 1993; Roberts, Coursol, & Morotti, 1997; Texas Education Association [TEA], 1996; Vandegrift & Wright, 1997). It is important to understand that school personnel often play many roles within a school. A math teacher may also serve in the role of math club moderator, as well as cheerleading coach. An assistant principal may also be a health teacher and basketball coach. These roles are

based on distinct knowledge, skills, training, experience, and sometimes requiring a specific license or certification. School counselors are professionally trained, licensed or certified counselors who complete graduate level training that prepares them to work as human relations specialists in school and educational settings (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2001; Sears, 2002; Schmidt, 2003). Since school counselors have unique knowledge, skills and training why is there such confusion about their roles, and more specifically, the duties that fall within the practice of school counseling?

The roles and duties that school counselors perform can vary from school to school, school district to district, and from state to state. One study conducted in Ohio examined how school counselors spent their time. The results indicate that school counselors' duties include testing and student appraisal, guidance activities (not counseling), individual counseling, group counseling, consulting, resource coordination, administration and clerical duties, and other non-guidance/counseling activities (Partin, 1993). Another study conducted by Ballard and Murgatroyd (1999) surveyed k-12 school counselors in Oregon and Louisiana asking them to define their roles. The data revealed that developmental counseling, crises intervention, college and career counseling were the major roles of school counselors. Burnham and Jackson (2000) surveyed school counselors in the southeastern United States to assess the roles k-12 school counselors play. These authors found that school counselors perform individual counseling, small group counseling, group (classroom) guidance, consultation, appraisal, and nonguidance activities on a routine basis. Last, the Texas Education Agency surveyed school counselors in Texas and found that counselor duties included: teaching guidance, assist

teaching guidance, guide students, interpret test results, individual counseling, small group counseling, consultation, coordinate resources, referral, plan guidance curriculum, supervise personnel, plan standardized testing, other counseling duty and other non-counseling duty (TEA, 1996). These studies identify a variety of duties that school counselors perform on a daily basis for which they may or may not be competent. It is also important to understand the non-counseling duties that school counselors are asked to perform.

According to Partin (1993) the school counselor's job description has evolved to include numerous non-counseling related duties from supervising restrooms to conducting school fundraising. Several studies have been done assessing how school counselors spend their time (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Partin, 1993; TEA, 1996, Vandegrift & Wright, 1997). The results of these studies indicate that school counselors spend between four percent to twenty-five percent of their time performing non-counseling related duties. Non-counseling related duties often performed by school counselors include registration, scheduling, achievement / proficiency testing, maintenance of student records, special education related duties, school discipline, administrative duties, supervising students (lunch, study hall, etc.), teaching and subbing duties, nursing duties, and secretarial duties (Baker, 1996; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Fitch et al., 2001; Hatch & Bowers, 2002; Partin, 1993). School counselors are being asked to perform both counseling and non-counseling related duties by school administrators who may have little or no school counseling experience themselves (Paisley & Borders, 1998). The variety of these duties adds to the confusion that can occur in defining the role of the school counselor in many schools.

In defining the role of a school counselor, the American School Counselor Association (1999b) states that a professional school counselor is "a certified/licensed educator trained in school counseling" who "provides assistance to students through four primary interventions: counseling (individual and group), large group guidance, consultation, and coordination." Presently, the school counseling profession is advocating the duties of the school counselor be incorporated into a comprehensive developmental school counseling program targeted to meet the needs of the entire school community. Gysbers and Henderson (2000) describe a comprehensive guidance program where school counselors serve several roles including program management role, guidance role, counseling role, consultation role, coordination role, assessment role, and professionalism.

Myrick (1993) advocates a similar model focusing on individual counseling, small group counseling, classroom/large group guidance, consultation, and coordination. The national standards for school counseling programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) identify the following duties as methods to implement an effective comprehensive school counseling program: counseling (individual and small group), consultation, coordination, case management, guidance, program evaluation and development. These are further incorporated into the newly developed national model for school counseling programs (ASCA, 2003). School counselors are not "the counseling program" but are the competent counseling professionals at the heart of a comprehensive school counseling program (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Schmidt, 2003). The school counseling profession is moving from a service-oriented approach to a skills based, comprehensive approach

that requires school counselors to be coordinators as well as facilitators of a comprehensive program. Shephard Johnson (2000) states that

> the new millennium affords transformetive opportunities for school counselors to refine their professional identity as highly trained practitioners whose goal is to facilitate all students to become effective learners through provision of a contemporary integrated school counseling program that promotes the achievement of developmentally based competencies across academic, career, and personal/social domains (p.32).

To be effective in their positions as highly trained counseling and human development specialists school counselors must be clear about their competencies and scope of practice within a comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

Professional Scope of Practice

What is Scope of Practice?

Coy and Sears (1991) simply define scope of practice as the responsibilities for which one is trained. The term scope of practice seems to be deeply rooted in the medical field and with various medical professions including nurses (Guido, 1997; Trandel-Korenchuck & Trandel-Korenchuck, 1997) and medical doctors (Waring, 1998). More specifically, the term scope of practice is related to professional licensure. Licensure is a legal process by which permission is granted by a governmental entity, usually on the state level, to a qualified individual, to practice the designated skills and services of a specific occupation, in a specified jurisdiction, where practice is not possible without a license (Gladding, 2001; Waker Guido, 1997; Trandel-Korenchuck & Trandel-Korenchuck, 1997). To qualify for licensure can be a rigorous endeavor.

In order to qualify for licensure individuals must meet certain criteria that vary by profession. The criteria for licensure as a professional school counselor also varies by state but some common criteria include specific educational / training requirements, experience requirements, examination requirements, and criminal background checks (Farrell, 1997). All fifty states require that school counselors be licensed or certified to be employed in public schools (Farrell, 1997) indicating that there are specified skills and services that are unique and regulated in the practice of school counseling. These skills and services constitute the practice of school counseling.

Scope of practice is defined in the literature as the permissive boundaries of practice and identified parameters of professional service usually defined by state statue, rule, or both, and is reserved for those who are appropriately credentialed, usually through licensure or certification (Waker Guido, 1997; Schwab & Gelfman, 2001; Trandel-Korenchuck & Trandel-Korenchuck, 1997). The American School Counselor Association (1999a) supports counselor licensure laws that provide a legal definition of the counseling profession, minimum standards for entry at the master's degree level, and a defined role of professional school counselors. Unfortunately, state laws and school board policies governing school counseling do not clearly define a scope of practice nor do they adequately identify the roles and duties of school counselors (Gysbers et al., 2000; Murray, 1995). As stated earlier, in order to qualify for licensure, individuals must meet certain educational / training and experience requirements. The content of an individual's education, training and experience provide the foundation for a scope of practice that one is permitted to implement upon licensure.

Scope of Practice for School Counselors

Education and training are the first contributing factors to creating a school counselor's scope of practice. School counselors are trained in counselor education programs within colleges and universities. Counselor education programs prepare school counselors in a number of core areas including: professional identity; social and cultural diversity; human growth and development; career development; helping relationships; group work; assessment; research and program evaluation; foundations of school counseling; contextual dimensions of school counseling; and knowledge and skill requirements for school counselors (ASCA, 1999a; CACREP, 2001). In addition, clinical experiences in counselor education require school counseling students to complete anywhere from 200 clock hours to 700 clock hours of school counseling and related duties in a practicum or internship under appropriate supervision (ASCA, 1999a; CACREP, 2001; Farrell, 1997). School counselor education requirements do vary from state to state but the emphasis on these core areas seems to be prevalent in the practice of school counseling at varying degrees, at the elementary, middle school and high school levels (Sisson & Bullis, 1992). School counselor preparation and training set the stage for school counselors to provide competent counseling services focusing on academic development, career development, and personal / social development as outlined in the national standards for school counselors (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), and within the management system, accountability and delivery system components of the national model for school counseling programs (ASCA, 2003).

Once school counselors understand the strengths and limitations of their training they can then assess their own professional needs, as well as the needs of students,

teachers, administration and the rest of the school community in relation to the practice of school counseling in a comprehensive developmental school counseling program. The core areas of school counselor education focus on human growth and development, understanding the individual differences among students, families and constituencies in the school, and various relationship issues at the core of the educational process relating to students, teachers, parents, administration, and the community (ASCA, 1999a; CACREP, 2001; Schmidt, 2003) and should serve as the foundation of a school counselor's practice. As stated earlier, the literature outlines numerous counseling duties that school counselors perform that are unique and specific to school counselor education and training, as well as various non-counseling duties, that are not part of their training and preparation. Competent school counselors should perform only those duties for which they have knowledge and training, and that they are permitted to practice according to their specific license or certification. It is a school counselor's responsibility to provide a disclosure notice informing counselees about ones counseling approach and techniques, or scope of practice, as well as confidentiality limitations, at the outset of counseling (American School Counselor Association Ethics Committee [ASCAEC], 1997; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Schmidt, 2003). School counselors should also inform all constituencies within a school as to their scope of practice to dispel any uncertainty regarding the role of the school counselor. Consequently, school counselors must identify what specific counseling duties fall within their scope of practice.

A thorough understanding of ones preparation and training as a school counselor as well as developing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program are crucial to understanding the scope of practice of a school counselor. It is extremely

important to objectify what exactly a school counselor's scope of practice consists of and its boundaries. For this purpose, the practice of school counseling can be defined according to professional training criteria (ASCA, 1999a; CACREP, 2001), the national school counseling model (ASCA, 2003) and national standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), and commonly accepted counseling duties in the professional literature (ASCA, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999a, 1999b; Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Cunanan & Maddy-Bernstein, 1994; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Hanson, Whitson, & Meyers, 2002; Schmidt, 2003; Sears, 1993, 1999, 2002; Thompson, 2002). The practice of school counseling is providing school counseling services to students, school personnel, families, and members of the community through the auspices of an educational setting involving the application of counseling principles, methods or procedures to assist students in their academic, career and personal/social development and adjustment. Counseling principles, methods or procedures are approaches to counseling that emphasizes the school counselor's role in systematically assisting students though implementing the following services:

- Counseling – assisting individual students or groups of students, through the counseling relationship, to develop an understanding of personal problems, to define goals, and to develop a plan of action reflecting his/her/their interests, abilities, aptitudes and needs as these are related to healthy academic, career and personal/social development.
- Guidance – assisting individual students or groups of students through psycho-educational curriculum presentations consisting of broad goals and objectives for

a specified target population and is, ideally, integrated cooperatively into classroom instruction by both teachers and school counselors.

- Assessment
  - ❖ Student
    - Objective - selecting, administering, scoring and interpreting instruments designed to assess students' aptitudes, attitudes, abilities, achievements, interests, developmental and emotional characteristics
    - Utilizing professional knowledge, credible professional judgement and accepted theory to understand the needs of a student and render a course of action to best meets these needs which may include school counseling services or referral to a specialist.
  - ❖ Program – selecting, administering, interpreting instruments designed to assess the outcomes of a comprehensive school counseling program.
- Consulting – interpreting or reporting fact, theory or credible professional judgement to provide assistance in solving current or potential problems of individual students, groups of students, parents, teachers or administration.
- Referral - is the evaluation of data and circumstances to identify problems and determine the advisability of referral to other specialists.
- Coordination – providing direction, supportive service or administration to various components within the school setting, the family, and the community at large to positively influence students' academic, career, and personal/social development.
- Supervision/Administration

- School Counselor – providing direct supervision to other school counselors to enhance their professional development, skills, and abilities while at the same time, assuring the quality of service and safety of the student clientele
- Programmatic – manage and administer the daily and yearly operations of the school counseling program

School counselors are faced with a difficult job and often times ones duties are dictated by principals or other administrators with little or no school counseling experience (Paisely & Borders, 1998) or other factors unrelated to a school counselors' preparation and training (Coy & Sears, 1991). A common scope of practice for school counselors provides a foundation and a direction to who school counselors are and what role school counselors play in a school setting. This general definition of the practice of school counseling can serve as a template for school counselors to create their own scope of practice unique to their training and the needs of their school, district and state but in line with common school counselor preparation standards, the national school counseling model, and national standards for school counseling programs. Once this is done, school counselors are responsible for notifying counselees (ASCAEC, 1997; Corey et al., 1998; Schmidt, 2003) and the other constituencies (school personnel, administrators, parents, and the community) in schools as to their scope of practice.

Conclusion

The roles and duties that school counselors perform can be quite varied. As a result, there has been confusion as to what duties school counselors are trained and competent to perform. Paisley and Borders (1998) indicate that often times school counselor duties are dictated by principals and other school personnel, who have little or

no counseling experience. School counselors are mandated to practice the designated skills and services stipulated by their license or certification. These skills and services are commonly referred to in the medical field as scope of practice.

A school counselor's scope of practice is based on the professional education and training that lead to establishing professional competencies in school counseling. School counselor education standards (ASCA, 1999a; CACREP, 2001), the national school counseling model (ASCA, 2003) and the national standards for school counseling programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), and the professional literature emphasizes the school counselor's role in systematically assisting students though implementing various school counseling services including counseling (individual and group), guidance, assessment (student and program), consulting, referral, coordination, supervision and administration (school counselor and programmatic). These services can provide a foundation for school counselors to create their own scope of practice unique to their training and school environment. School counselors are obligated to identify and promote their scope of practice to all of the constituencies in a school to limit confusion about their role and help to meet the complex needs of today's children and adolescents.

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